



A coalition of over 175 health, labor, civil rights, poverty, professional, religious and advocacy organizations responding to HIV and AIDS.

December 8, 2004

The Honorable George W. Bush
President
United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

Last week, on December 1st, the world commemorated the seventeenth annual World AIDS Day, a time in which we pause to remember those who have died in the global pandemic while rededicating ourselves to working towards a future without AIDS. In your statement released on that day, Mr. President, you noted that, “My Administration has made turning the tide against HIV/AIDS a priority.” On behalf of the membership of the National Organizations Responding to AIDS (NORA) coalition, we would like to thank you for your efforts in responding to the global HIV epidemic over the past four years; however, at the same time, we ask you consider ways in which you can further commit the resources of the federal government to addressing the continuing epidemic here in the United States over the course of your second term.

NORA is a coalition composed of over 175 health, labor, religious, professional, and advocacy groups that represent a broad consensus on HIV-and AIDS-related policy, legislation, and funding. Our member organizations represent the public health response to HIV and AIDS. While we have been pleased to note the commitment to global health represented by your global AIDS initiative, we remain concerned that more must be done to address the domestic epidemic. Over the past four years we have seen mostly level funding in domestic HIV prevention, care, treatment, and research programs – despite the fact that over 40,000 Americans are newly infected with HIV each year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that today a million people are living with HIV in the U.S. More troubling still, roughly half of them are without access to medical care – 250,000 of which do not even know that they are HIV infected. Mr. President, these facts demand a real, concerted response from your Administration over the next four years.

One of the hallmarks of your Administration’s response to the global epidemic has been an emphasis on the HIV prevention model known as “ABC” or the “Uganda model.” We know that each of the three elements of ABC (abstinence, be faithful, condoms) was equally important in affecting the drop in HIV prevalence that has become known as the Uganda success story. However, there was also a fourth element to the Ugandan approach, one which unfortunately is often left out when we talk about what works in HIV prevention. That missing piece is national leadership. Without the passionate support of President Museveni the people of Uganda would

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not have been able to take the proactive approach to HIV prevention that lead to dramatic, double-digit drops in infection rates. Today, in the U.S. we are seeing an increase in HIV infection rates, particularly among the populations most at risk. This crisis demands leadership from the highest levels of government. Mr. President, we have seen you exercise leadership when it comes to the global pandemic, now we are asking that you show that same leadership here at home. We believe the ideal venue for you to exhibit this leadership would be to include your plan for addressing the domestic HIV epidemic in January's State of the Union address.

In light of the transitions that will be taking place in the coming months, we ask that you remember this need for real domestic leadership in HIV as you assemble the federal health care leadership for your second term. Simply put, this country needs a Secretary of Health and Human Services who will talk about HIV, specifically the domestic crisis. Secretary Tommy Thompson successfully spearheaded the launch of your global AIDS initiative; now it is time for the Secretary chosen for your second term to make the domestic HIV crisis a priority of his or her tenure.

In order to be effective, federal leadership on HIV needs to come from all levels. NORA has been disappointed that thus far United States Surgeon General Richard Carmona has remained silent on HIV – despite the fact that it is the third leading cause of death among African Americans 25-34 and the sixth leading cause of death for whites and Latinos in that age group. In 2001, HIV was the leading cause of death for African American women ages 24-34. These disturbing statistics demand a response from the public health leadership of this country. Therefore, we hope that you will instruct each and every member of the Administration's health care team to prioritize HIV for the next four years.

In your statement to mark World AIDS Day, you noted that, "Our country and other nations around the world are working to bring new hope to those suffering with HIV/AIDS and contribute to a healthier future for people around the world." As you prepare for your second term, NORA asks that you continue to make HIV and AIDS a priority by extending new hope for a healthier future to people living with HIV in this country. We look forward to working closely with you to make this a reality.

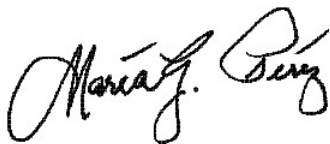
Sincerely,



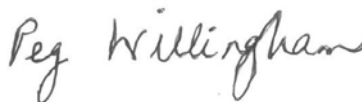
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